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GHANA & EU - FOREST LAW ENFORCEMENT GOVERNANCE AND TRADE - VOLUNTARY PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT



In 2009, Ghana signed a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) with the European Union (EU) under the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) action plan.

The Ghana-EU VPA aims to ensure that all timber and timber products destined for the EU market from Ghana comply with national business and forestry laws, as well as the timber regulations of destination EU countries.

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Various Ghanaian wood products.



A section of the participants at a multi-party FLEGT stakeholder meeting

Additionally, the implementation of the VPA is meant to enhance governance and law enforcement by forestry regulators, and ensure that the exploitation and trade of forest resources is carried out in a highly responsible manner.

Development of the VPA process has been participatory, enjoining multiple groups from government, the private sector and civil society (including forest owners and dependent communities) to deliberate and identify factors that do not inure to the benefit of Ghana's forest and environment; while formulating strategies and means by which their good condition can be safeguarded.

The Ghana-EU VPA has therefore been a vehicle for addressing the needs of different stakeholders, and for including many people who have hitherto not had a voice in forestry decision-making.

Beyond legality, Ghana's quest is to promote sustainable forest management (SFM) practices - and thus encourage adoption of ambitious action plans emanating from a number of reforms introduced in the forestry sector.

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Women are an integral part of the wood industry.



Expansion work at the Takoradi port.

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Some of the major reforms include, amendments to the legal framework on forests, which have influenced timber sourcing and harvesting rights, transportation, processing and sales/export.

In this regard, timber trade associations in Ghana, who constitute the private sector in the FLEGT-VPA processes, play a critical role by complying with the legality standards in their production processes.

One of the key developments is the Ghana Legality Assurance System (GhLAS), which has five functions that are used to verify companies' compliance with the legality standards.

Through this, an electronic Wood Tracking System (WTS) has been developed to facilitate traceability of legal timber along its supply chain and to undertake the necessary due diligence congruent with the European Union Timber Regulation (EUTR).



Barcode labeled sliced veneer.



Barcode labeled sliced veneer.

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Once Ghana has implemented the GhLAS and other commitments outlined in the VPA, it will export only verified legal timber products accompanied by FLEGT licenses to the EU.

The benefit of it is that FLEGT-licensed timber products from Ghana will be able to enter the EU market without undergoing the due diligence checks required by the EUTR.

It's been 10 years now since Ghana signed the VPA with the EU. The various stakeholders (government, private sector, civil society) have been actively contributing to the processes to pave way for FLEGT licensing.

These have included Parliament enacting new Timber Resources Management and Legality Licensing regulations, building operational capacities for timber trade associations for FLEGT licensing, restructuring of the timber sector, carrying out audits to verify and guide the legality compliance, amongst others.

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Bolts labeled for milling.



A lumber production line.

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The new WTS has gone through trials and test shipments carried out to assess the smooth trade of timber products when FLEGT licenses are in force.

As at 2019, Ghana is yet to place FLEGT-licensed timber on the market, but with final technical assessments of the Ghana Legality system being carried out in the same year, it is envisaged that Ghana will soon follow Indonesia to be the second country to place legal timber on the EU market.

The six notable milestones that the Ghana Timber Industry has achieved in compliance with FLEGT licensing are:

[1] Adherence to Legally Sourced Timber.

Apart from the strict requirement of timber companies to be duly registered with the Registrar General's Department (RGD), apply for Timber Utilization Contracts (TUCs) or permits for approval amongst others, companies are further monitored in the forest during logging operations to ensure that harvested trees tally with allocated yield.

The electronic WTS facilitates these checks by tracing the origin of timber products being transported and verifying authenticity of legal documents accompanying consignments.

The timber product consignment being exported is covered with a FLEGT license to the EU, a permit elsewhere and in the domestic market.



Each log has a unique identification code.



Identifying logs at the logyard.



A log "landing" site in the forest.



A stack of processed lumber.

[2] Environmentally Sustainable Harvesting Operations & Production Efficiency.

Under FLEGT - VPA, companies are following the Manual of Procedures (MoPs) for forest operations ensuring best operational practices for minimal environmental impact.

This enhances sustainable forest management by preventing excessive damage to the forest ecosystem. Plantation development is fervently pursued to ensure future flow of timber resource for processing.

Transformation to products follow practices that ensure optimum use of the timber and its residues for high value items as well as wood fuel for domestic and industrial use.

[3] World Class Mill Operations That Adhere to Workers Health and Safety Requirements.

Significantly, the FLEGT processes have instilled best logging and factory operational practices in timber companies, so as to facilitate minimal environmental and personnel impact at the mill and forest operations levels.

Companies have become more conscious about health and safety in their operations along the supply chain, as it's a key requirement for legality compliance in FLEGT licensing.

Companies provide personal protective equipment (PPEs) to workers involved in logging, transport and processing which all their employees are required to use at all times when working. FLEGT licensing ensures prescribed wages are paid, and health & safety in the work place is monitored.

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Charging a kiln dryer.



A chainsaw operator in PPE.



Finger jointed lumber.



Storage of labeled veneer.

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[4] Standardized And Diversified Timber Products for Domestic & Export Markets.

Underpinned by the FLEGT licensing, wood products meet Ghana Standards Authority's (GSA) world-class specifications that reflect international standards.

All products are inspected and certified to have met product standards by the Timber Industry Development Division (TIDD) of the Forestry Commission (FC) of Ghana. More importantly, first-class laboratory testing facilities are available for exporting companies to utilize following the request of European customers.

The emphasis on sustainable utilization and wood conversion efficiencies has encouraged companies to diversify their mill operations, producing several types and ranges of products for their wide range of customers, nationally and internationally.

[5] Companies Alive To Social Obligations.

Ghana's FLEGT licensing reinforces positive contributions to community life, especially in timber producing communities and thus enabling social benefits for forest communities.

Through this, 5% of stumpage fees is paid by timber contractors directly to all communities within 5km radius of TUC areas.

Most companies provide additional support to development of their communities of operation through funding educational, sports, health and cultural facilities. Exporting companies have constructed and maintained about 20,000km feeder roads.

The wood industry jobs offer opportunities to many people to stay in rural areas without poverty and hardship, especially women and youth.



A modern water treatment plant.



A modern hospital in a community.



A local highway.



A weighing bridge.

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[6] Improved National Infrastructure For Ease Of Transport And Business-Friendliness.

The reforms backing FLEGT licensing are being supported with an enhanced road network that enables the transportation of wood products within 24-hrs from any point of production to the port.

There has also been significant expansion of the Tema and Takoradi ports, including regular calls by major international shipping lines.

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We truly appreciate your kind attention;
and look forward to working with you
to support our sustainable forests,
and ethical industry practices
in Ghana and beyond.

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